

## **Maximising School Outreach: Content, resources, their provision and effectiveness**

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### **Report**

The Transitional Wellbeing Team deliver outreach support to school and college students as part of the OfS funded project *Transitioning Students Effectively: A student led approach to mental health support* led by The University of Lincoln. Transitional outreach work aims to prepare students for the challenges they are likely to face in the next stage of their lives ahead of leaving their current education environment. Sessions aim to manage the expectations of students, reducing culture shock and increasing preparedness, and cover a wide range of topics with a core focus on managing change, self-managing emotions, life skills, and where to access support for a range of practical and emotional concerns.

To ensure that engagement is high and content is relevant, the transitional team organise specific focus groups within schools for Year 11 students. Aimed at generating ideas for future workshops, the focus groups concentrate on understanding the worries, thoughts and concerns school students have about the changes that lie ahead for them and gathering relevant feedback on the proposed content of future workshops. This feedback is then built into the workshops and sessions delivered by the transitional team.

In addition to focus groups, which concentrate on future planning, the transitional team aim to act responsively to evolve and adapt sessions in real time by gaining direct feedback from students whilst a session is in progress, facilitating immediate interaction. Content can be adapted 'mid-session' with the provision of an 'Ask it Basket' if engagement is not high. Students are asked to write down any anonymous questions or concerns which are then read out by the facilitators, with advice given to the whole group. The 'Ask it Basket' also identifies common themes which are then built into future sessions and resources to ensure other students benefit from the information. Recently emerging themes range from money worries and accommodation concerns to socialising and making friends. Subsequently, engagement during sessions has increased and feedback shows that the content is relevant and helpful to those students attending:

*"The session was very helpful. I feel more confident now and I know how to deal with my emotions in case of anxiety or depression".*

Covid-19 has presented new challenges for the transitional team, with school closures and social distancing rules meaning outreach work is currently on hold. Using the information and feedback gathered during focus groups and transitional workshops, sessions are being transformed into a digital format, available online, to ensure that content and resources continue to be accessible during this time. The team are creating online voice-over presentations, digital workshops with workbooks and digital resource packs along key themes such as Emotional Fitness (*5 Ways to Wellbeing, Managing Emotions, Help and Support*), Next Steps (*Being Independent, Living with Others, Managing Change*) and Getting Ahead (*Organisation, Study Tips, Overcoming Procrastination*). These packs will be provided to educators for use both during the pandemic when face-to-face delivery is not possible, and also when the transitional team are unavailable to deliver face-to-face outreach support, and include written and digital content, guides, discussion points, resources and activities. In developing the packs, the team have ensured that they are not time limited and are sustainable post-pandemic, enabling schools and colleges to utilise these when needed in the much longer term. Workshop sessions are also now available in an online 'workbook' format for students to access, use and work through in their own time and at their own pace.

Continuous adaptability is key to the project, and both through the gathering of feedback and the conversion of resources to digital formats, the adaptability of sessions and the adaptability of the means of provision will ensure sessions remain accessible and relevant, both during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.